

# Coins make the grade by subtle degrees

By Roger Boye

**T**his week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

**Q**—At a recent coin show a dealer was asking \$400 for a 1904-O silver dollar marked “MS-65” and just \$24 for another such coin marked “MS-60.” What do those terms mean and why is the “MS-65” so much more expensive? Both coins looked fine to me.

**R. P., Orland Park**

**A**—Hobby pros grade uncirculated coins on an 11-point scale ranging from MS-60 (“mint state—typical”) to MS-70 (“mint state—perfect”). An MS-60 coin must show no trace of wear but often is marred by tiny blemishes called “bag marks” and other imperfections. An MS-70 must be free of even the slightest flaw.

Collectors normally will pay fancy prices for pristine keepsakes because so few coins merit the MS-70 classification or even MS-65 (mint state—choice). An MS-65 usually retails from 4 to 20 times more than the same coin in MS-60.

**Q**—Is there any way to be certain an old U.S. gold piece is genuine gold without ruining the coin?

**A. G., Mundelein**

**A**—Send the item to the American Numismatic Association Certification Service—or its equivalent—where experts would test the coin's specific gravity, among other things. You'd get a certificate of authenticity if your rarity is judged genuine.

**Q**—In the 1970s we paid \$12.50 each for 100 Franklin Mint medals commemorating the history of flight. How much is

our investment worth today?

**E. P., Chicago**

**A**—Each item in your set contains 1.25 ounces of silver, worth about \$8 to a precious-metal dealer. The supply of privately issued medals from the 1960s and 1970s greatly exceeds demand from collectors. Most such collectibles sell for their metal value only.

**Q**—Do Lincoln pennies from 1943 have any value?

**J. J., Evanston**

**A**—Uncle Sam made Lincoln cents out of zinc-plated steel in 1943 to conserve copper for the war effort. “Fine condition” specimens usually retail for about 15 cents each.

● At least 20 dealers will do business next Sunday at the annual show of the Schaumburg Numismatic Society. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Itasca Holiday Inn, 860 W. Irving Park Road in Itasca. Coins, paper money and baseball cards will be on sale; admission is free.